

STILL OF THE NIGHT

The Stiller juggernaut rolls on as the actor, writer, producer and director resumes guard duty in a world-famous museum.

Lawrie Masterson reports

THE dollar value in this room is inestimable. It is a library on the second floor of a building known as "The Castle", part of the immense Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, and its walls are lined not only with books but also display cases containing artefacts from cultures ranging from Native American to ancient Chinese.

And, under an elaborate and enormous chandelier, there's Ben Stiller... the real one, not an escapee from Madame Tussauds. Stiller is not only a comedy star, but also a writer, director and producer and, through his DreamWorks-based company Red Hours Films, quite a player in Hollywood these days.

At 43, he hardly qualifies as a museum piece, but he is worth a bundle, nevertheless.

And, in the words of Ricky Gervais, who doesn't pull punches in either his comedy or general conversation, Stiller also is "a genuine bloke".

"He's a huge star, I think possibly the biggest comic actor in the world," says Gervais, one of Stiller's co-stars in *Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian*. "He's one of the most successful actor-producers in the world and you can tell he's got the

weight of the world on his shoulders sometimes, because there's a lot of pressure to stay at the top.

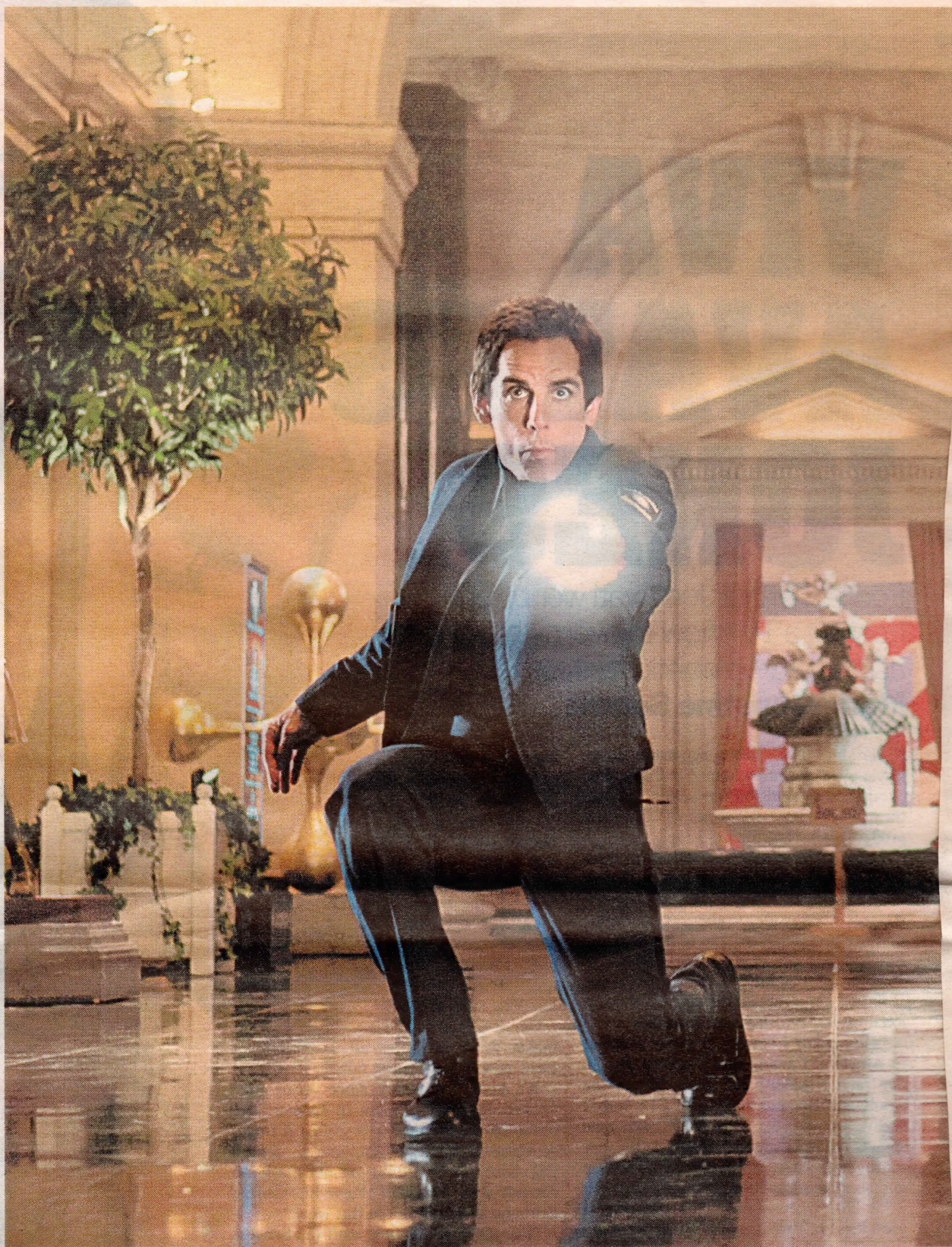
"But he's always charming. The more I get to know Ben, the more I like him as a person."

If Stiller is stressed out at the moment — even by the thought of where he is sitting in relation to that chandelier — he certainly isn't showing it.

"I think success comes down to whatever is important to you in your life and the sort of choices you make," he says. "It can be stressful if you choose to let it be, but I think with anything in life it's how you decide to approach it."

"I've been able to step back sometimes and go, 'You know what? This doesn't have to be stressful if I don't want it to be'. Stress is too exhausting."

As he has proven with *Zoolander* (2001), which he also wrote and produced, his two movies as Gaylord "Greg" Fokker (2000, 2004) and last year's *Tropic Thunder* (also co-writer, producer and director), Stiller certainly has no shortage of comedy talent nor great dramatic actors lining up to work with him — Will Ferrell, Jon Voight, Dustin Hoffman,



Robert Downey Jr, Steve Coogan, Barbra Streisand and Robert De Niro featured in just those four films.

Director Shawn Levy's *Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian*, a sequel to his 2006 hit, is no exception, with Amy Adams, Hank Azaria and Christopher Guest among the stars joining Gervais, Coogan, Robin

Williams and frequent Stiller co-star Owen Wilson, who were also in the first film.

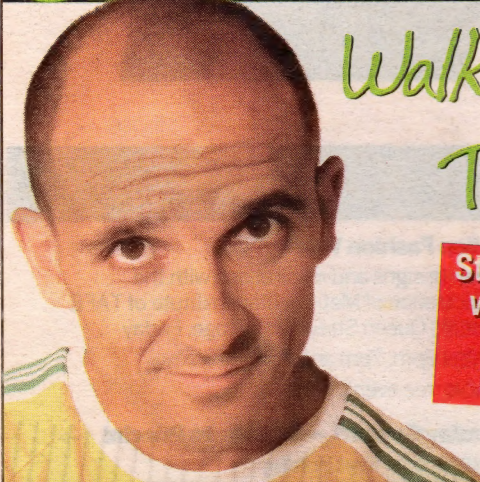
Even Stiller, who reprises his role as museum guard Larry Daley, sometimes has to figuratively pinch himself in the middle of a scene with someone such as Christopher Guest, the 61-year-old former *Saturday*

Night Live regular whose trademark "mockumentary"-style movies such as *This Is Spinal Tap* (1984) and *Best In Show* (2000) have become contemporary comedy classics.

"I was very excited that we got the cast we have and any time you're working with people you respect is always a good thing because it makes

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TERMINATOR SALVATION: THE FUTURE BEGINS

(M) June 4

Set in post-apocalyptic 2018. Christian Bale is the man fated to lead humans against an army of terminators. Sam Worthington, Helena Bonham Carter, Bryce Dallas Howard.

I LOVE YOU, MAN

(MA) June 4

A successful real estate agent embarks on a series of bizarre and awkward "man-dates" to choose a best man for his wedding. Paul Rudd, Jason Segel, Jaime Pressly.

LAND OF THE LOST

(To be classified) June 11

Will Ferrell is a time traveller to the dinosaur era.

IS ANYBODY THERE?

(M) June 4

Michael Caine is a retired magician who reluctantly enters an aged-care home and befriends the death-obsessed young son of the owners.

SUNSHINE CLEANING

(To be classified) June 11

Comedy with Amy Adams and Emily Blunt as sisters in the crime-scene clean-up business.

THE HANGOVER

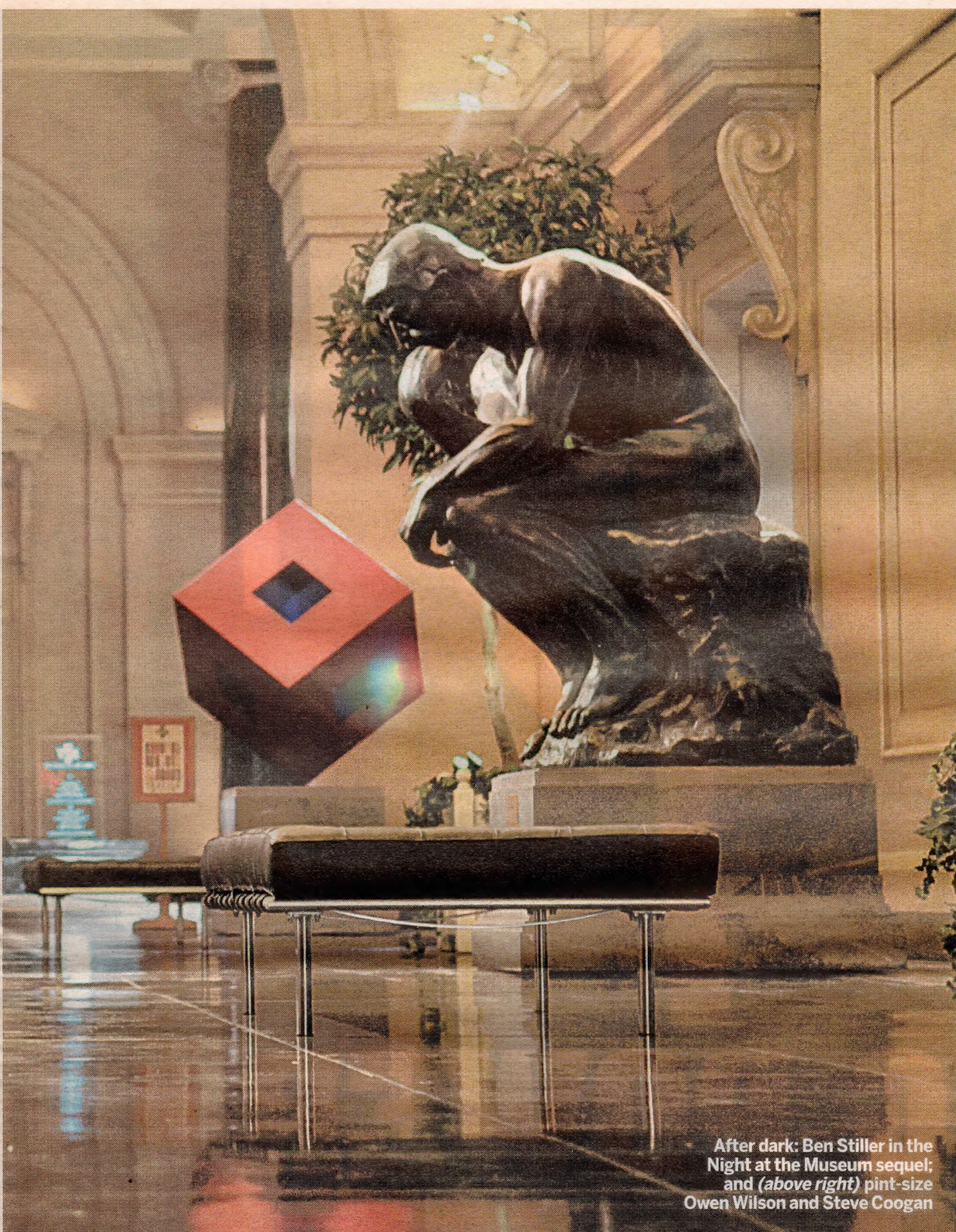
(To be classified) June 11

Comedy about a bachelor party that goes wrong. Bradley Cooper, Heather Graham.

YEAR ONE

(To be classified) June 18

Lazy hunter-gatherers Jack Black and Michael Cera are banished from their primitive village and take an epic journey through the ancient world.



After dark: Ben Stiller in the *Night at the Museum* sequel; and (above right) pint-size Owen Wilson and Steve Coogan

everybody want to bring the best possible version of themselves to a scene and you work as hard as you can," Stiller says.

"But you don't want to push it; you want to let it happen. Guys like Christopher Guest and Robin Williams are sort of iconic to me. I'd never worked with Chris Guest

before and didn't really know him, and I'm such a huge fan that it was a little bit intimidating in the beginning, but he's such a nice guy and he's so easygoing.

"He really wanted to be in the movie. He was a fan of the first movie. I tried not to geek out too much around him and say, you know,

'Remember that thing you did in the *National Lampoon Radio Hour*?' because I go way back with stuff of his that I loved.

"But he's very self-effacing and to hear who his comedic idols are and who he looks up to and his influences was really exciting to me."

In the first *Night at the Museum*,



I was very excited that we got the cast we have and any time you're working with people you respect is always a good thing because it makes everybody want to bring the best possible version of themselves to a scene

Stiller's character Larry, the divorced father of a young son, takes a job as a night guard at New York's Museum of Natural History. He soon discovers that an ancient Egyptian curse causes many of the museum exhibits — among them a statue of Teddy Roosevelt (Williams), a miniature cowboy named Jedediah (Wilson) and the Roman tribune Octavius (Coogan) — to come alive and wreak havoc between closing time and dawn.

But Larry triumphs for the first time in his life after discovering the power of knowledge and the pleasures of unexpected friendships.

Three years later he is a successful inventor, but realises he has left fun and friendship behind in his pursuit of fame and money. Simultaneously, his friends at the Museum of Natural History have fallen out of favour with the crowds, replaced by holograms and other hi-tech devices. They are about to be boxed and placed in permanent storage somewhere in the recesses of the Smithsonian.

Reaching their new digs, the newcomers discover an Egyptian ruler Kahmunrah (Azaria) in a particularly nasty mood after 3000 years of slumber. He has joined forces with three of history's most notorious figures — Ivan the Terrible (Guest), Napoleon Bonaparte (Alain Chabat) and Al Capone (Jon Bernthal) — in a plot to take over the Smithsonian, and then the world.

Larry to the rescue, with a little help from his old buddies and new friends including the alluring aviatrix Amelia Earhart (Adams), honest Abe Lincoln (Azaria doubling up as voice talent) and Albert Einstein (voiced by frequent Christopher Guest collaborator Eugene Levy).

"I really like the idea of the movie being able to start off with Larry in a different place, not the same guy as he was in the first movie," Stiller says.

"Any time you're doing a sequel, the character should have evolved from where he was at the end of the first movie, and that was a real key for me."

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